

#04 Serah Farron

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Final Fantasy XIII: Reminiscence -tracer of memories-

#04 Serah Farron

| *"Ever since I was little, my big—my elder sister did everything for me."*

The perpetual snow on the rocky mountain peak drips water droplets that eventually become a clear stream that sustains the mountain flowers. The rapids, which crash into several waterfalls as they rush down the gorge, are tempered as they are caught by the pockets of deep forest, and discover stillness in deep, dark pools in the shade of the trees. The stream breaks out of the forest and crosses the plains, skirting around hills, and when it arrives at the fields, the current is nothing but gentle. That river, bringing the blessing of the earth to the people, is just over there.

This town, which is situated on the bank of the river, has prospered through trade since long ago. There is a university that boasts several centuries of history, famous for a library that holds a collection of books numbering in the tens of thousands.

Apparently the establishment was originally a library that became a university afterwards. According to legend, a particular aristocrat, obsessed with collecting historical documents, bought up all the old documents that he could get his hands on, from ancient maps to handwritten drafts and letters. He invested vast amounts of treasure into set after set of valuable books, and scholars began to visit him, seeking such information. They engaged in vigorous debate, polishing their scholarly principles and theories, and when young people heard rumours of this, they gathered to ask for lessons, and before long a university had formed.

Apparently, however, the aristocrat died in bankruptcy.

His complete absorption in the collection, to the point of the ruin of his health, could perhaps be blamed on the fickle river. The flow of the stream is like time itself. It seems unchanging, and the water flowing by is always new—what has gone by never returns. As lonesome as one may think this is, the flow of the river cannot be stopped. And, time and rivers alike both relentlessly wash away that which is old and that which we miss. Time makes us forget the past, and the years steal away even our lives. Perhaps the aristocrat, living on the bank of the river, understood the ruthlessness of time, and, wanting to save for the world even just a little of that which was disappearing, became infatuated with the act of collecting.

If so, then perhaps I too—unusually obsessed with the memories of 'that world' that are lost in the reaches of time,

continuing to gather data so that I may record them—am no different from him.

(4) Serah Farron

I had arranged to meet Serah Farron in a cafe near the library. We had corresponded regarding my background and the aim of my data collection ahead of time, but before we begin the interview, there's something I want to say to her.

"So far, I have interviewed many people and collected data on their memories of 'that world'. Most people don't remember anything. For those who do, it is only fragmentary. I myself also had vague memories, but... they were like a faint dream. They didn't feel real."

Serah, who has been listening, seems as though she understands what I am trying to say. "But not any more... Yes. After listening to what Hope and Mr Sazh had to say, and meeting everyone from NORA, you changed." I had told her everything that has happened so far.

"Yes, my memories gradually came back. I remembered what kind of person I had been. I was a citizen of Cocoon, just starting out as a reporter. I exposed the truth covered up by the government—the reality of the Purge policy—and ended up on the run from the army, but I was saved by everyone from NORA. That isn't a dream or a delusion, it is a 'reality' I actually experienced in the past. I must have lived in that world." This is what I have been wanting to say to her: "Ms Serah, you saved the world. I lived in that world. Thank you so very much for fighting to protect us."

When I met Mr Hope and heard that they had saved the world, it had still felt like some distant affair. But, the return of my memories made me see. They hadn't fought to protect some unrelated far-off land, it was the very world I myself had lived in. They saved me—I became able to feel this in my heart. I had felt I must express my gratitude.

Serah gives a wry, distant smile. "Me, save the world? Well, I don't know..." It doesn't seem like she's merely being modest, she seems honestly awkward. "People were looking after me the entire time. Ever since I was little, my big—my elder sister did everything for me," mumbles Lightning's younger sister, looking down.

The cursed l'Cie, enemies of humanity

The sisters had lost both their parents early in life. Lightning, the older sister, joined the army and supported their two-person family. Serah, the younger sister, met Snow Villiers while she was a high school student, and began a friendship with him around the same time she decided to continue onto tertiary education.

"My big sister wasn't very happy about it. She thought Snow and the others in NORA were an irresponsible lot. Well, Snow certainly was a little rough... But, I'm sure if she had just talked to him properly, she would have understood right away."

"You didn't have time for that, though. You unfortunately came into contact with a fal'Cie, and were turned into a cursed l'Cie."

"That's right... I became the enemy of everyone living in Cocoon, of humanity. I had absolutely no desire to harm Cocoon, of course. But..."

Even if she held no malice, the general public of Cocoon saw l'Cie as hostile, and tried to eliminate them. The surge of the people's emotions in their near-blind fear of l'Cie had shaken society and led to the tragedy of the Purge policy.

And then, in the middle of the Purge war, time stopped for her. Right before the eyes of her elder sister Lightning and her fiance Snow, she transformed into a crystal statue and went to sleep.

That was the beginning of the battle that changed the society called Cocoon forever. Lightning, Snow, Sazh, Hope

and Vanille, who had been watching the instant Serah fell asleep, and later Fang, despite clashing fought their destiny. In the end, when they saved Cocoon from destruction, Serah was released from her crystal sleep.

However, when Serah awoke, the world had warped in a new way. Lightning had disappeared.

Through time, distorted

“I heard that when you were revived from the crystal, you were told that Lightning had died.”

“Everyone thought... that she had sacrificed herself to stop the collapse of Cocoon. But I just couldn’t believe it. I could remember very clearly that my big sister had smiled at me and given my engagement to Snow her blessing when I woke from the crystal. But, I was the only one who did.”

“In reality, your memories were correct, Ms Serah, and it was everyone else’s and the history of the world that had been distorted. Your elder sister was not dead, she was imprisoned in another world, Valhalla. When you realised the truth you made up your mind to put the world back onto the correct history, yes?”

“I wasn’t thinking quite that deeply, at first. Noel was the one who kickstarted me. He and Mog came and gave me a message from my sister... and I just rushed off because I would have done anything to see her,” Serah recites, in a soft voice. “And after that, too, it was thanks to Noel pulling me along that I was able to continue the journey.” She gives a reserved shrug. “Yeah, like I said, I was relying on people the entire time.”

She speaks of her journey in which she repaired the history of the world spanning several hundred years. If the flow of time is like a river, then that situation was one where the ground had been warped by a great force, changing the current. Serah and her friends had flattened the rocky outcrops that were stopping up the flow and dammed up places that were flooding in an attempt to return the river to the original flow.

It is an unbelievable series of events, but it’s the gentleness of her tone that makes me believe it’s the truth.

Gate. Paradox. Artefact. Fragment—these were things that defied the laws of space and time. The power of the Farseers, who could divine the future. The seeress who repeated life and death infinitely, Yeul, and the old enemy who threw the world into disorder trying to save her, Caius Ballad.

At the end of the journey, Serah lost her life.

“And then my big sister protected me again. I died, but she held my soul and protected it. It turned her to crystal.”

“The two of you were together then, right?”

“Well... I spilled out somehow. At some point I was separated from her. I was asleep, so I couldn’t have noticed when it happened.”

Special beings

“Do you and the others have things you can’t remember, too?”

“Huh?”

“I lived in ‘that world’, too. As a reporter in Cocoon, my name was ‘Aoede’. However, those memories only returned very recently. The level I previously remembered things at was merely vague scenes. I wasn’t the only one. I have conducted a great deal of data collection on that world, and not a single person can remember their own name—save for you and the others. Are you and the others special beings who can remember everything from that world?”

“No, we aren’t. I’d forget my own head if it wasn’t screwed on... and I’m nobody special. You remembered too, didn’t

you? Your name and your experiences from that world, you remember them properly now. In that case, maybe you're not the only one whose memories could come back someday if the right chance comes along."

"Perhaps the key lies with the existence of you and your friends. I believe my memories returned thanks to the data I was able to collect from all of you starting with Mr Hope. That is why I want to continue to collect data from you and the others about the things that happened in that world, and find out as much as I can."

"...What are you going to do with what you find out?"

"I want to put it into one story and release it to the public. Listening to you all brought my memories back. In the same way, perhaps if I spread the story of that world, then it's possible that more people could regain their memories and —"

"Wait, please." Serah's voice, while not loud, has taken on a clear and unprecedented edge. "Remembering that world might actually cause pain to people. It could bring back bad memories, or... if they get stuck on memories of an old world that doesn't even exist any more, what if it holds them back from the life they are living now?"

Her words pierce my chest. It feels as though she is talking about me. Am I, fixated on and engrossed in chasing memories of a lost world and obsessed with the past, sacrificing my life?

As though she has read my mind, Serah smiles sadly. "We do, after all. I remember that world. There are things I wish I could forget, but there are joys I suffered to gain, too, so in the end all my memories are important. I'm glad I can look back at them. But thanks to those memories we can only ever be who we were in the old world. Sometimes I feel distanced from this new world, you know?"

"Then, is it meaningless to try to know about that world? If I would have been happier forgetting about a bygone past, then I—"

"I'm sorry, I wasn't criticising you. I'm sure you have it harder than me. You had the memories of another life suddenly returned to you when you were already living with your feet on this world. You're wavering between the memories of two worlds—maybe you're the real special being here."

Night has nearly fallen by the time the interview draws to a close. Parting with Serah Farron, I linger on the banks of the river that flows through the town, the night breeze crossing the surface calming my thoughts. Despite the lights of the town, the current is dark and deep. The river at night is deep black throughout as it flows off into the dark distance.

Was my data collection meaningless?

If the flow of the river is like time itself, then perhaps the way I've acted, chasing after memories of an age now gone, of a world that no longer exists, is as foolish as trying to scoop out river water that has long since flowed into the sea. Is that water now undrinkable salt water, no matter how you try to take it back?

But, Serah had told me something.

I don't know... what following the memories of that world means in this world.

But, you are different. You remembered that world while living in this one. I think someone like you will be able to find a meaning that's right for you.

I hope you can find everything out.

So, I will resolve myself. It seems like she understood, too. When we parted, she had shaken my hand firmly, and told me the whereabouts of Snow Villiers.

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